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Christian Social Union

OXFORD UNIVERSITY BRANCH

A SOCIAL  
POLICY FOR CHURCHMEN

BY THE REV.

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HEAD MASTER OF BERKHAMSTED SCHOOL

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## Christian Social Union.

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This Union consists of Members of the Church who have the following objects at heart:—

- (i.) To claim for the Christian law the ultimate authority to rule social practice.
- (ii.) To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties of the present time.
- (iii.) To present Christ in practical life as the living Master and King, the enemy of wrong and selfishness, the power of righteousness and love.

Members are expected to pray for the well-being of the Union at Holy Communion, more particularly on or about the following days:—

The Feast of the Epiphany.

The Feast of the Ascension.

The Feast of S. Michael and All Angels.

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## A SOCIAL POLICY FOR CHURCHMEN.

THE late Dean Church, in his history of the Oxford movement, has given an admirable account of the Church in the Reform days. He tells us how that movement was a revolt against want of Church principles and "quiet worldliness;" against easy obligations and episcopal pomp; against "country gentlemen in orders who rode to hounds, and shot and danced and farmed." He describes how the new party succeeded to an earlier zeal and enthusiasm, and profoundly modified it; how they became the true inheritors of the personal religion which the Evangelicals had found wanting, and, to their lasting honour, had striven to supply.

Some future historian will tell us, with equal charm of style perhaps, but never with deeper self-effacement, how these two great moving forces—the force of personal religion and the force of corporate Church life—have moulded, inspired, transfigured our ideals of to-day. For it cannot be denied that Churchmen have fully admitted the claim of Christ to rule, in the smallest details, the sphere of practical individual life. On spiritual individualism the Church is now insisting by every popular mission or quiet retreat. And, further, the great Oxford revival has undoubtedly taught us, with a voice unheard by our grandfathers, our corporate oneness in sacrament and spiritual effort.

But within the last three years a new question has come to press upon the minds of men. Not that it is new in itself; but the pressure is stronger than it has ever been, and the sense that it *must* be solved, that it can no longer be neglected, is passing into a new enthusiasm amongst us. This is the Social Question. Of this question it is the task of the Church to find a Christian solution; and the attitude and utterances of Christians, be they

bishops, priests, or laymen, in regard to it, are being closely watched.

Now, have we, as a Church, with one mind and heart, yet realized that religion has a social expression ; that Christ claims this life as well as the next—is King of living men, King of society in village, town and nation ; that law and politics, international relations, club-life, social organization, even social gradients and class spirit,—all the complex tumbled relations of humanity are subject to His claims, must be ruled by His laws, moulded and transformed by His spirit ?

The Report of the Committee of the last Lambeth Conference appointed to consider the subject of the Church's work in relation to Socialism, signed by the Bishop of Manchester, is very outspoken. While disavowing spoliation or injustice, this report emphatically pronounces in favour of an extension of the system of small farms, and of workmen's co-operative societies ; “does not doubt that Government can do much to protect the proletariat from the evil effects of unchecked competition ;” advises Boards of arbitration, the acquisition by municipalities of town lands ; suggests the abolition of entail ; encourages the requirement of economic knowledge from candidates for orders ; and bids the clergy endeavour, in sermons and lectures, to set forth the true principles of society. These resolutions, which would have seemed revolutionary even to the Whig prelates of an earlier date, are strengthened by the words of the primate in his charge of 1889, now published under the title of *Christ and His Times*. No Churchman who is a social reformer can possibly feel, with these words ringing in his ears, that he is doing anything but carrying out the very wishes of his leaders. One might perhaps go one step further and desire that the bishops, as a body, could see their way to an initiation of some social legislation in the Lords. This would emphasize their attitude, and would bring home to their clergy and faithful laity the strength of their resolution to lead us to a practical policy.

For experience of clerical meetings forces one to feel that the clergy, as a whole, do not yet quite realize how far their leaders have already gone and are prepared to go. The *Lambeth*

*Report* and the archbishop's charge have not, we think, been read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested by all of us. And yet, if we are ever to persuade "the masses" to be Christians, the principles therein enforced must be realized, and that without delay. We must see, with vision taught by Christ, the social claims of man on man; we must help each other by deciding these claims, as they come before us, by a Christian judgment; we must remove hostility to Christ by showing Him forth, in our own self-surrender and sympathies, to men alienated by misunderstanding or resistance. How are we to do this? We must do it by speech and action. For both speech and action, vigorous, united, decisive, the time has undoubtedly come.

And first, by speech. We can speak the truth. The truth has no longer to be learnt. Even Bismarck has acknowledged that there *is* a social question. This is the truth we can drive home. In the pulpit, in the club, in the press, on the platform, in the drawing-room, this is what we have to maintain: "There *is* a social question, gentlemen: do you know its dangers, its demands, its hopes?" True words, Christian words, are not necessarily revolutionary. At all events the world was never converted by silence. And we are at a point in our social development when to keep silence, whatever our motive, is little less than immoral. On many points we still want light; but light is better found by going to it than by waiting in a cave. Principles at least are clear; and principles are clues to lead us out into sunlight. Here are a few undeniable Christian principles. The *use* of property is greater than property. Society exists for the sake of the men and women who constitute society. Wealth is not our own; it is only a loan, a trust. Surrender even of individual rights for the sake of Christ is nobler than defence of privilege. No man may be an idler, by the law of Christ. Wealth is no gauge of worth. Rights ought not to exist, unless duties are fulfilled. These are moving principles, undeniably Christlike. These are the principles that controlled His life and inspired His death. These we must spread, must speak. In the light of these, as if the Friend of taxgatherers and sinners were in actual presence beside us, we must judge ourselves. What an

effect might be produced if only a vigorous assertion of these principles were made, as suggested by the bishops, from every pulpit !

When Socrates told Gorgias and his friends that it was better to suffer evil than to do evil, and that to escape punishment for wrong was a misfortune, he made himself a laughing-stock to the Greek "natural man." So will some of these principles, though perhaps less confessedly, be a laughing-stock to the British "natural man." If he does not deny them outright, he will regard them with great suspicion, and will vote resolutely against their practical issues. But, on the other hand, no doubt a large number of Churchmen will resent the notion that they do not fully agree to them all. The difficulty, however, is not in theory. It is in practice that the limitations begin. And what we want, therefore, is the courageous enforcement of a practical public policy. The threads of individual effort must be upgathered, and our leaders must plait them into an effective rope.

This brings us to our second need—action. What are we doing to show forth the social principles of Christianity in practical life ? Let us see. What are the social needs of to-day ? What are the social wrongs of to-day ? Let us ask the two questions together, not because needs and wrongs are necessarily synonymous, but because even needs, if unsatisfied, become at last wrongs. Needs appeal to love, wrongs appeal to righteousness: and Christ is at once the power of righteousness and the power of love.

Let us first take the question of the housing of the poor. Do we ourselves own cottages ? It is to be presumed that the majority of English cottages are owned by professed Christian laymen. Do, then, their cottages, if occupied by families, possess a third bedroom ? How many are there that do not possess a second bedroom ? In cases where they do not, do they afford the chance of a human and moral, not to say Christian, home ? How, in fact, has it come about that any such problem exists, while an "educated Christian gentleman" is found in every village with a tongue to speak ? Oh, it is a very simple difficulty ; with the present cost of building, no such cottage

will pay the owner four per cent. But, we answer, by the law of Christ it cannot be a question of economics; it is vital to village ethics and to the souls of men. Unless we remedy this, we cannot profess and call ourselves Christians, and still hold such property, still innocently enjoy our own luxuries while we deny to our tenants the elements of a moral environment. If we remedy this, then and then only can we justly appeal to our fellow-men; and appeal, not only justly, but successfully. For such an example would put apathy to shame. And it is apathy that stands like a stone wall between Christian theory and the general practice of landlords. And this apathy becomes positively quickened into obstruction by dread of the cost. Yet the pair of carriage-horses, or the London season, or the run to the Riviera, are still not forgotten.

It is sometimes said that the worst cases are to be found in open villages, where the retired butler or the small tradesman or the successful publican has invested his earnings. No doubt; but the fact that this is endured is a proof of the apathy of public opinion on the question, and is largely brought about by the consciousness of a considerable mote, if not a beam, in the critical eye. "Public opinion indeed apathetic?" a reader may say: "why, an act has been quite recently passed to alter all these evils!" Just so; but how many know that? How many know its powers? How many have done as at least one well-known suburban rector has done, and enforced its execution in the face of reluctant vestrymen? Like so many excellent English laws, it is as yet nobody's business in particular to enforce it; and the fact that it remains so widely unenforced is a fresh proof of the apathy of English Churchmen. For, even though we do not ourselves possess such property as I have spoken of, can we not yet refuse to sit with our hands before us and do nothing? Can we not tell the labourers themselves where the remedy lies? Can we not tell our neighbours the real fact, how, *e.g.*, the illegitimacy in English village life, nay, the more awful evil still, the *incest* in it, is the direct outcome of the crowded cottage?

It is very possible that the solution may involve serious

sacrifices on the part of those who, like ourselves, have real *homes*; yet shall we not welcome even so costly a solution? Is it not true Christianity to give up, not "all" but at least a good deal, that we possess, that the poor may live as men? Shall we "go away sorrowful" at this? It is, of course, to be granted that there are many who are anxious to find a solution of this and kindred questions. Be it so; but it must be realized that it is quite certain that the cure of such evils will involve wider social changes than we may be as yet prepared for. Our devils may be cast out, but it will have to be at the cost of some pigs; and the question is, which we prefer, our lower gains or our poorer fellows housed and in their right mind.

This, then, is one great wrong, for all our commissions and statutes, not yet by Christian public opinion seriously and practically taken in hand. Another great wrong arises out of the facilities offered for drunkenness. We may not all be teetotallers; we may think prohibition utopian or fanatical; we may be contented with a vision of general moderation, marred only by a few irrepressibly hopeless cases, which may be borne with in the cause of liberty and freewill. But the present evils we cannot deny; the excess of opportunity; the frequent neglect by the police of breaches of law; the occasional instructions from their superior officers "not to be too busy;" the rags, misery, squalor, vice, promoted by drunkenness; and, notwithstanding these issues, the enormous fortunes made.

Now, if men were resolved to show forth the power of righteousness in social life, is it really credible that the brewer would make so many unfortunate mistakes as to the character of his tenants? Would he wait till endorsement was threatened, before discovering and ejecting his unworthy representatives? Would the illicit Sunday trading and the unlatched back-door be so entirely overlooked, if they resulted in the sale of less and not of more beer? Whether local option be the right remedy or not, would the demand for it have been adopted as a plank in their platform by a great political party, if the magistrates as a whole had acted in the interests of the millions and not of the few? It is true that last year the magisterial courage

screwed itself up to refusing some two hundred licenses in the whole country; but even while fully impressed by the proportion between the refused and the unnecessary, we may fairly ask how it comes that it has taken so many years of temperance agitation, capped by a serious proposal to compensate out of rates, to discover the very powers that might from the first have barred out the wrong? And why is it that, even now, magistrates hesitate so long to endorse or refuse a license?—is it really mercy for the tenant, or is it *regard for the property*?

The evils and horrors of drunkenness have been truthfully and graphically “placarded” before the nation. A large number of the clergy (not by any means all) have thrown themselves into the conflict. Yet how many laymen of position in a country village will give up their late dinner and help to rally their tempted fellows by some counter-attraction? “It is the parson’s business.” Is it? That is the point. Undoubtedly, if we are our brother’s keepers by the law that condemned Cain, much more by the law of Christ, it is theirs as well. We must tell them so; we must show them an example; we must carry into lower town and village life the art, the song, the higher recreation, that has possibly helped to civilize and Christianize our own. Above all, we must raise public opinion on this and the kindred question, the question of purity, and make impossible the moral apathy of so many well-to-do people as to the less reputable methods of those huge profits that build a workhouse on one side of the road and a palace on the other.

It may be possible, let us by all means grant it, to be an upright publican and a resolutely watchful and clean-handed brewer; but it ought not to be possible, in the face of public opinion, to be anything less.

Again, is it really a quasi-divine ordinance that at the end of most ordinary working-men’s lives there should be no hope beyond Poor Relief? that, except in the case of a skilled artisan, a man with a family to support cannot under present conditions save enough to enable himself in his old age to rest or even to be independent of external aid? Is this to remain the unalterable destiny of the mass of our workers? It has

been said to be according to natural laws ; so was slavery in the eyes of Greek philosophers and even of this century's slave-holders. Surely, there is no social tendency that is not largely created or capable of being modified by the society that expresses it in fixed law and custom. Our own views of property, seemingly so ethical and absolute, are entirely contrary to other views, once equally accepted. The question is, Can we be, as Christians, content with this ? If not, can we modify the tendency of capital to accumulate in few hands ? Can we, in fact, get rid of the workhouse ? The solution of this problem would undoubtedly bring untold happiness to thousands. Are we ready to make large personal sacrifices to secure a solution, or is our view of property, " J'y suis, j'y reste " ?

Surely, these three questions, even if we took no more in hand, viz. the housing of the poor, the facilities for drunkenness, the hopelessness of old age in the labouring class, loudly call for a practical proof from us that we are more than willing, even eager to show forth the principles of justice as taught by Him we call Master.

But, apart from unjust conditions, social life in England has needs which will not become wrongs unless, when fairly formulated, we disregard them. And in this sense the three pressing needs of labour are the need of education, the need of leisure, and the need of a progressive public life.

To take the last first, complaints are made that none but the old and feeble remain in our villages. Why is this ? It is because town life is more interesting and progressive. Supply the elements of interest and progress to villages, and they will not thus be emptied. Bagehot has pointed out how in the past a progressive freedom has grown only with public discussion. This element must be given to village life, or rather, as our furthest ancestors on English soil would say, must be given back to it. In how many villages, even as things now stand, are the elections of churchwarden or overseer or parish representative in the diocesan conference carried out in the evening, when working men can attend ? What self-educative influences now exist even in model villages, where a generous landlord builds

good cottages and gives good gardens ? Do those rose-covered walls hide no corrupting secrets, no repressed ennui, issuing in occasional discontent, and offering a ready plot for the weeds of agitation ? What these men need is not charity, but justice : not tidy footpaths and gabled roofs, but manhood ; and manhood can only come to us by having a man's work to do. And a freeman's true educative work is not to cheer his squire's name at a harvest home, even though he be a good squire, so much as to learn independence through a share in the responsibilities of government.

Is it likely that such men would be less good Christians for their freer manhood ? Is it conceivable that the Christ of Galilee would not sympathize with a method to which, after all, the middle classes owe their independence of judgment and freedom of religion ? Do we in our consciences believe that He would be found, if now on earth, at the dinner-table of a modern pharisee, indignantly exclaiming to some group of leisured fox-hunters and successful capitalists that "we had heard quite enough of the working man" ? Would the Apostle of the Gentiles, who saw in spiritual status no difference between the Roman master and his *slave* (conceive the feelings with which this simple truth must have been first heard !), be now attempting to repress, thwart, delay, adulterate, or even compromise concessions to these reasonable needs, or to deal with the workers by the empirical methods of a village dominie, with a judicious mixture of cajolery and ear-boxing ?

Take again the question of representative government in our elementary schools. It is surely very short-sighted of the English clergy to resist all forms of representative government. A good despot, with or without a little senate of intimate friends, chosen on a co-optative principle, may perhaps often work well ; but the drift of the age is against it ; and though you can divert an afternoon's stormwater, you cannot stem back the tide. Let us agree that the ratepayer's, *qua* ratepayers, have nothing to do with voluntary schools. Could not some generous scheme of parental representation be worked ? People no longer believe on bare authority ; on bare authority the working-classes will

not long support even a religious education. Admit them within the inner circle ; give them an insight into its value, a constitutional interest in its maintenance, and they will be your best allies.

This question of school government opens out the whole field of higher education. It is a lamentable mistake to suppose that because the workers are not highly educated they do not know the value of a higher education. No sooner do a body of working men unite to start, say, a co-operative store, than they discover how much they have to learn. In every case known to us they do not despair, but set to work to supply their need. Similarly, without doubt, the desire as well as the need for technical and even literary education would surely spread with them, as it has with the middle classes, by planting the seed and allowing them to join in watering and pruning and training.

Here again is a further opportunity offered to us to show how we have learnt of Christ to do to them as we should surely wish them to do to us. We have to lend them our brains, in complete unselfishness, not that we may secure their favour, but even that they may, if need be, learn to do without us. It may be said that this would be a most undesirable result ; but we may be quite sure that if the classes less high in the social scale could confidently reckon on the sympathy of those above them, in their efforts to raise themselves as high as possible, their very last thought would be that they should do without them. When once English working men have confidence in their leaders, it has been found that they have been rather too ready to follow than otherwise. But this allegiance would be inspired by quite another spirit than is now created by condescension or charity, or, it may be added, flattery.

For there are two things which the body of workers, taken in the mass, resent. They resent condescension, and they resent adulation. By nothing less than sympathy and self-sacrifice can be acquired the authority that can control the growth of false economics or class selfishness. And therefore it becomes of the utmost consequence what attitude we, as Churchmen, seeking to express the mind of Christ towards new problems, are likely to

take up in regard to the newly arisen and very seriously meant desire of the workers for more leisure.

Is it not obvious that without more leisure the higher culture must remain a sealed book to them? And yet, without some taste of this higher culture, what leisure they have is scarcely likely to be well used. One might as well hope to develop character by locking up a child after lessons were over till the next day's task should be due, as expect to do away with the attraction of coarse amusement by prolonging monotonous employment. Are we not bound to sympathize with this desire for more leisure? Indeed, is it not a sign of much promise that the desire for more leisure should at present be manifestly stronger than the desire for more wages? And, to secure a reasonable share of leisure for the mass of men, what more Christian claim can be urged than to be willing to make personal sacrifices? To our own leisure we owe certainly our cultivation and refinement, probably much of our religion. Men want time even to say their prayers, much more to learn how to enjoy a picture or a book. How can we refuse to labour in brain and life, if need be, to make these things possible for our less favoured fellows?

But, even if we shrink from the seeming risk of agitation involved in strong and emphatic advocacy of social reform, there is at least one parochial scheme we could promote both in towns and villages. Co-operative societies, by which are meant not limited liability companies, but genuine unions of working people, have had, in distribution at all events, astonishing success. In a small town like Berkhamsted, in Hertfordshire, a distributive union of 330 families already own, after a few years' effort, a joint capital of £3000. At the village of Childe Okeford, in Dorset, the Rev. T. G. Brymer commenced in 1883 a co-operative village store. In two months it had repaid the loan of initial capital of £200. Debt has been gradually abolished. The stimulating principle of a nest egg has been learnt by the poor. Wages are being more wisely spent. A beneficial change is passing over the cottages. Can nothing be done by clergy and laity to help forward such schemes as this? Our villagers are

mostly in debt ; large numbers of small tradesmen in our poorer villages are half bankrupt ; prices paid by the poor are inordinately high. Bad as the credit system is everywhere, there is no class so demoralized by it as the agricultural labourer. Some small tradesmen would no doubt suffer ; but, after all, the world was not created for the middlemen, and the greater happiness of the greater number must in this case be our justification.

So far, mere questions of politics have been strictly avoided ; for, though it cannot be justly said that the Church should have no politics, she should at least have no party. But, however desirous we may be to avoid saying anything that savours, however distantly, of mere political controversy, it would not be right to fail to put on record two points that cannot be entirely severed from electioneering.

One point is this. In very many places at the present time the clergy have exclusive control over the parochial school buildings. In villages at least there is often no other place available for public buildings. Yet even during the most recent elections, in country districts, it has been matter of observation that the meetings allowed in the schools have been constantly of one party colour only, and have been presided over by the rector. We will not ask if this is politic ; for that it certainly is not. In more than one recent bye-election the rural labourer has rejected the favoured candidate. Pitted, so to speak, against his rector, he has won ; and the reputation of his rector's Church has suffered. It has manifestly been in these cases most impolitic. But is it a high example at any time of Christian impartiality ? Is it likely to lessen the estrangement between the labourer and the Church ? likely to make him an impartial judge of school control, if a government ever propose to hand over Church schools to the ratepayers ? No man, apart from such interests thus clearly risked, with any knowledge of the compromises, surrenders, and surprises of recent politics, can pretend that most of our party differences are not after all very human and reasonable. Why brand as immoral, by outlawry from the only public building in a village, the advocacy of opinions that, sooner or later—to judge from the history of the past quarter of a century—will be merely the tidemarks of your own advance ?

And the other point is this. Large numbers of good Churchmen are the victims of an afterthought. They sympathize with very much in these social aspirations; they sincerely feel the force of the Christian argument in their favour; but, they say, if we join in promoting these changes, desirable as many are, we may help to put in power a party that wishes to disestablish the Church? Surely this hesitation to obey the voice of conscience is more dangerous to the interests of Christ in England than can ever be any threatened political action. Surely it is more Christian to "do right and fear not." For what, as Christians, we are concerned with is not the putting of parties in and out of power, but the leavening of public opinion and the lifting of human life. And if our leaders at this great crisis in English social history will only lead us, and we, Christ's humbler rank and file, will only courageously follow them, so as to do this with singleness of aim, the very danger that is dreaded, if it be really a danger, will pass away; at least, if undesirable or unjust, it will not appear, to those who will certainly have to decide it, to be less so by the fact that these social claims have been earnestly promoted by our sympathy and sense of justice. How could it be otherwise, when we should be translating into social action the Master's words, and "labouring not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth" unto the higher life? For this is the ultimate purpose of all social advance. Higher wages, greater leisure, widened opportunities, roomier homes, it is sometimes argued, are in themselves of little worth apart from character and self-restraint. This no doubt is true; but to expect a development of high character and self-restraint without these is as reasonable as to expect a boy to learn to swim without water, or a plant to grow without sunshine or soil. Let us no longer claim to be "good Churchmen," as the phrase goes, if we shrink from a combined, active, and proclaimed policy of social progress; so doing, even if attacked by Samaritans, the trowel with which we are building will be a better plea in defence than the sword we are advised to carry; and if we fall, we shall at least be true martyrs and not monopolists.

T. C. F.

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